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Agenda items 7 and 8

General debate**Consideration of reports submitted by the Secretary-General****Draft report****Chapter III
General debate**

1. Statements in the general debate were made by the following States members of the Committee on Information: Algeria, Argentina, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Brazil (on behalf of the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries), Burkina Faso, China, Cuba, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Egypt, Greece (on behalf of the European Union), India, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Jamaica (on behalf of the Caribbean Community), Japan, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Mexico, Monaco, Mongolia, Morocco (on behalf of the Group of 77 and China), Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, Senegal, Sri Lanka, the Sudan, Tunisia, Ukraine, the United Republic of Tanzania, the United States of America, Venezuela and Yemen. The session was also addressed by two observers: Canada (on behalf of Canada and Australia) and Switzerland. The general debate was preceded by statements made by the Chairman of the Committee (see annex I) and the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, Department of Public Information (see annex II).

2. In taking up the substantive questions before the Committee, several speakers said that they attached great importance to the commemoration of World Press Freedom Day, which this year would be observed at United Nations Headquarters on 2 May. One delegation, speaking on behalf of a large group, regretted that freedom of the press did not exist in many countries. Freedom of opinion and expression was a right accepted worldwide and enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. He strongly condemned the use of violence to hinder the work of journalists and attempts to control the media by distorting or suppressing information.

3. Another speaker, stressing the importance of World Press Freedom Day, said that there was a need to consider the role that the United Nations could play in



opening up closed societies and in promoting access to impartial and unregulated information. He hoped that in the future, people throughout the world would be able to look to the information resources of the United Nations as a reliable source, especially when their own Governments denied them the opportunity of free access to information. Another speaker, expressing concern at the lack of balance in the way news was presented, hoped that the United Nations would have a wide impact in assisting national media organizations in providing accuracy and balance in the dissemination of news and information. The media message of the United Nations, noted another speaker, should take into account the cultural distortions seen in some public media campaigns. Such distortions could threaten international peace and security by creating tensions among cultures and civilizations. The establishment of an equitable information and communications order should be a primary objective of international public information activities. Such an information and communications order could contribute to the democratization of international society and the creation of favourable conditions for the maintenance of international peace and security, asserted another speaker.

4. Most speakers emphasized the central role of the United Nations, and of the Department of Public Information as its public voice. One delegation, speaking on behalf of a large group, noted that since the crisis in Iraq, world opinion had been characterized by deep concern and sadness. At such a difficult time, the United Nations must persevere and reflect the diversity and cultural integrity of civilizations. The United Nations must bring together that most important "human wealth" and orient it towards peace and life, and, to the extent possible, put an end to war and suffering. He underlined that it was very important for the Organization to be highly visible and to adapt itself to meet the new challenges. In that process of revitalization and adaptation, he said, the Department of Public Information had been called upon to play a significant and dynamic role, for it was the Department that had helped to create the international image of the United Nations, explain its role and show the impact of its actions on international relations.

5. Another speaker, expressing his firm belief in the central role of the United Nations in today's world, underlined the importance of a strong Department of Public Information as the "voice of the Organization". Given the situation prevailing in the world today, he noted, the Department should intensify its campaign to promote the purposes and principles of the United Nations and multilateralism. These were times that called for greater efforts to inform the world of the broader dimensions of the work of the United Nations, said another speaker.

6. Several speakers referred to the growing digital divide between developed and developing countries and called for greater efforts by the Department to close that gap. Paradoxically, while the world was becoming smaller, the digital divide was growing, one delegation commented. Under such circumstances, he said, the Department of Public Information must ensure that all countries had equal access to the benefits of information technologies.

7. One delegation noted that many developing countries lacked the necessary infrastructure and resources to benefit from the rapid advance of information and communication technologies. Until the ever-increasing digital divide was addressed effectively, radio broadcasting remained the most cost-effective and universal means of communications in many developing countries, he said. Another speaker, emphasizing the need to rely on traditional means of communication, noted that

since the need for information was most critically felt in the developing world, which did not have many options at its disposal, the United Nations must make a special effort to reach out to target audiences there. Another speaker, referring to the challenges many developing countries faced, noted that the media in developing countries were lagging behind, not because of a lack of political will, but because of the lack of resources to build up the information infrastructure.

8. Several speakers noted that the World Summit on the Information Society, the first phase of which would take place in Geneva in December 2003 and the second phase in Tunis in 2005, provided a good opportunity to make serious efforts to close the current digital gap. The growing disparity between countries could become worse if efforts were not made to take advantage of technological advances, one speaker said. In that regard, the World Summit should bring about a consensus to share technology in accordance with the spirit of the Millennium Declaration, he noted.

9. Some delegations felt that, given the challenging nature of the times, the Committee on Information had a key role to play in reversing the growing polarization between different cultures and religions. As one speaker noted, the current negative trends were bound to affect the harmony and homogeneity desired by all. He emphasized that the Committee on Information had the mandate to promote the paramount goals of the United Nations and to create better understanding and greater good will among the nations of the world by building bridges between various societies, cultures, religions and regions. One delegation, expressing support for the Secretary-General's vision and proposals for reorientation of the United Nations activities in the field of public information, argued for reaffirming the key role of the Committee on Information in guiding the process of restructuring and repositioning the Department of Public Information. Another delegation called for a review of the role of the Committee on Information, especially in the wake of recent developments in the world. The Committee should abandon its "dry review" of the work of the Secretariat, one speaker said, and become more involved in the promotion of sources of information. In recent months, the world had witnessed great distortions in the press. The Committee should consider that issue and work closely with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to improve the access of developing countries to sources of information, he said.

10. The new mission statement of the Department of Public Information was welcomed by most delegations. The goals and purposes of the Department had now been better formulated and the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the Department had been enhanced, noted one speaker. In welcoming the new direction adopted by the Department, many speakers felt that the new operating model and organizational structure introduced under the second phase of the Secretary-General's reform process would provide the Department with renewed focus and vigour. One speaker, speaking on behalf of a large group, felt that the new strategic directions taken by the Department provided it with an extraordinary opportunity to further rationalize and optimize its activities, maximize the use of its resources and enhance its political visibility and impact. Another speaker, pledging his delegation's support for the current efforts, noted that the reorientation process undertaken by the Department was both difficult and complex and could not be solved with a single step. The reform process was yielding practical results and

providing new opportunities to publicize the role of the Organization, said another speaker.

11. Another delegation, welcoming the report of the Secretary-General on reorientation, felt that the Department had made every effort to reorient its activities. Reform, he noted, was a process, not an event. Keeping this in mind, the Department should continuously adapt itself to meet new challenges. The new divisions established as part of the Department's reorientation, one speaker noted, might provide a way to disseminate the culture of peace and strengthen mutual respect among cultures and civilizations.

12. One speaker, speaking on behalf of a large group, cautioned that, while the progressive restructuring of the Department had been noted, the process should not be conducted at the expense of the programmes related to the priority developmental issues, such as conflict prevention, poverty eradication, HIV/AIDS, dialogue among civilizations and cultures, sustainable development, the battle against international terrorism and the needs of Africa. One delegation, noting that not all areas it considered important had been listed, asked the Department to include in its list of priorities such areas as education, culture, the fight against drugs and organized crime, gender equality, gender perspective and greater emphasis on the need to promote tolerance and non-discrimination. Another speaker, on behalf of a large group, noted appreciatively the Department's resolve to be guided by the priority areas identified by the Millennium Declaration, as well as the World Summit on the Information Society and the International Year of Freshwater 2003. He hoped that similar attention would be paid to the Barbados +10 international meeting, to be held in Mauritius in 2004. One delegation noted that the basic message of the Department included seven goals but that it disregarded the one relating to international cooperation and transfer of technology and transparency in international trade. That goal was crucial if necessary resources for the other seven were to be mobilized. He cautioned that if the Department failed to raise global awareness of the need to ensure the necessary human, technical and financial resources to attain the Millennium Development Goals, the current negative trend of diminishing development assistance would continue.

13. One speaker noted that the communications goals of the Department had been better defined and cooperation between the Department and other Secretariat departments strengthened with the creation of the Strategic Communications Division, which would be responsible for developing communications strategies to promote the work of the United Nations on priority issues. Another delegation, commending the Department for implementing its new organizational structure, especially noted the designation of focal points to work with substantive departments to identify target audiences and to develop information programmes and media strategies for priority issues. The integration of the network of information centres into the Strategic Communications Division was essential for coordinating and streamlining the Organization's information activities, said one delegate. Another speaker, reaffirming his delegation's support for closer coordination between the Department of Public Information and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, underlined the importance of adopting a more proactive and professional approach in relations between the two Departments in order to successfully achieve the mandate of peacekeeping operations. He asked the Department of Public Information to apprise Member States of the progress made so far in respect of modalities of cooperation and relevant structural rearrangements,

and its future plans for increased coordination with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. Another speaker, recalling that the General Assembly had declared 29 May the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers, welcomed the Department's plan to commemorate the Day for the first time this year, which would be the fifty-fifth year of United Nations peacekeeping.

14. The question of the regionalization of United Nations information centres was addressed by several speakers. Some of them noted with appreciation the Secretary-General's proposal to rationalize and consolidate the information centres located in Western Europe into a hub and welcomed the fact that this would achieve a better distribution of resources to information centres in developing countries and lead to the redeployment of resources to other high-priority activities, such as advancing multilingualism on the United Nations web site and the systematic evaluation of the impact of major products and services. One speaker, on behalf of a large group, stressed the importance of the information centres for the developing countries, especially the least developed countries, as valuable sources of information and means of communication and interaction with the host countries. Another speaker, on behalf of another large group, reiterated his group's belief that the establishment of such regional hubs should take place on a case-by-case basis and should be sensitive to the unique needs and interests of the region involved. One speaker, also welcoming the Secretary-General's proposal, asked the Department to gradually apply the hub approach to other regions, invariably in consultation with the Member States concerned.

15. One delegate, disagreeing with the proposal for regional hubs, argued that the critically important activities and functions of an information centre could not be performed through a "remote control" method from a regional hub. The population in European countries would need to be informed of the role, purpose and functions of the United Nations as candidly and effectively as those in Asian and African countries, he argued. It would not be prudent to undertake such a reorganization and restructuring at this important time, he said, and he asked the Department to review the proposal. Another speaker, who described the proposal for regionalization as "not a good idea", told the Committee that, for countries in Latin America geographical distances and transportation costs made it unfeasible for a certain information centre to have clients beyond the borders of the host country. One delegation suggested that the regional hub in Western Europe should be located in Geneva. One delegation, stating that the closure of nine information centres in Western Europe could create some confusion, asked for clarification on the future of the information office at UNESCO in Paris. Another delegation, calling for greater contributions from host Governments in support of information centres, proposed to amend the "Guidelines and criteria for the reorganization of United Nations information centres" so that the overall support of a host Government was properly reflected.

16. Several speakers reviewed the performance of individual information centres. One speaker described the role of the information centre in Ouagadougou as "irreplaceable", and suggested that, given the crisis in Côte d'Ivoire since 2002, it had a strategic position in terms of public information and initiatives to restore peace and handle related humanitarian issues. The information centre in Dhaka was praised by a speaker for creating a very good web site in the local language, catering to the information requirements of some 250 million people in and outside the country. The role of the information centre in Tokyo was described as crucial by one

delegate, who praised its web site, publications and events as valuable sources of information about the United Nations for the Japanese people. Delegations also praised the positive role played by information centres in Sana'a, Moscow, Mexico City and Buenos Aires. The information component of the United Nations Office in Minsk was also commended for its performance. One delegation, arguing for development of web pages as the "field voice" of a given locality in the applicable language, suggested that a web page of the information centre in Jakarta in Bahasa Indonesia "would be most suitable and cost-effective". An observer of the Committee expressed the interest of his Government in strengthening the United Nations Office at Geneva, not only as a world centre, but also as an information centre. However, one speaker regretted that the web site of the information centre in Lagos was not functional and contained little information about the United Nations. Another delegation proposed that national information officers at United Nations information centres be allowed to serve as heads of the centres, not only as a cost-cutting measure, but also to ensure effective communication with the people in a language they understood.

17. Several speakers urged that greater attention be paid to the needs of the African continent. One speaker, referring to the New Partnership for Africa's Development, asked the Department, through its new Africa Section, to use the New Partnership programme as the platform for reaching out to the intended audiences and mobilizing international support for its implementation. Similarly, another speaker, noting the core messages of the Department, affirmed that this was consistent with the objectives of the New Partnership and pledged his delegation's support in the realization of these objectives.

18. Many delegations considered the Department's web site, managed by the News and Media Division, to be a real success story. One speaker reiterated his delegation's view that the performance of the Department's web site team was a textbook example of what could be accomplished using existing resources, when dedicated professionals applied the knowledge, commitment, flexibility and creativity necessary to get the job done. The speaker especially commended the web site team for its live webcasting of United Nations meetings and its timely posting of items on its News Centre page. Another speaker, describing the web site as a very cost-effective medium for disseminating information about the activities of the Organization, noted that it had been of immeasurable benefit to all. One delegation, noting that the Internet had transformed the information services of the United Nations, cautioned that this innovation could also be a source of hatred and intolerance. In addressing the issue of information, he said, care must be taken to ensure that the developments that made the widespread availability of the Internet possible were used to advance the ideals of humanity.

19. The issue of multilingualism in the work of the Organization was a major topic of debate for many delegations. One speaker, addressing the Committee on behalf of a large group, praised the Department for the progress achieved since the launch of the United Nations web site. However, he stressed the need for strict observance of multilingualism, which reflected the richness and diversity of the international community and strengthened the values of tolerance and mutual respect. The success of the web site could be further carried forward if the Department were able to develop a multilingual United Nations News Centre, another speaker commented. The introduction of the Arabic News Centre on the web site was welcomed by several speakers. One delegation, however, regretted that the implementation of the

Spanish-language News Centre had once again been delayed. Another delegation, taking a critical view, commented that the English-language web site of the Department needed improvement, particularly with respect to the timely delivery of information and news of interest to the public; the search function should be enhanced, and comments made by the Secretary-General on his visits outside the United Nations should be made promptly available. Some speakers supported the integration of the Official Document System with the United Nations web site, as it would enhance the multilingual nature of the web site by providing free, public access to all United Nations parliamentary documents in the six official languages of the United Nations. One speaker, while commending the Information Technology Services Division and the Department of Public Information for their continued development of the Official Document System, asked that the service be made freely and publicly available on the web site.

20. A majority of speakers stressed the importance of traditional means of communication, especially radio, for reaching out to audiences in developing countries. The pilot project on the development of international radio broadcasting for the United Nations was welcomed by several speakers as a very cost-effective way of spreading the United Nations message. They welcomed the results of a recent survey on the estimated worldwide audiences for United Nations Radio programmes. According to the survey, in any given week more than 133 million people around the world listen to United Nations Radio programmes in the six official languages of the Organization. One speaker recalled that over the years United Nations Radio had retained tremendous vitality and would continue to carry the voice of the United Nations all over the world. For the developing countries, that meant advantages that could not be replicated by any other means of communication. He noted that the weekly audience for Chinese-language programming of United Nations Radio had reached 26 million, which represented 20 per cent of the entire global audience of United Nations Radio. Another speaker, on behalf of a large group, applauded the efficiency and dedication of the staff in charge of radio broadcasting in Portuguese. As for the Caribbean, one speaker noted that approximately 1.5 million listeners of United Nations Radio came from that region. Advocating the continuation of this project, a position shared by many delegations, he urged that resources be devoted to this activity. Another speaker, also calling for the continuation of international broadcasting by United Nations Radio, noted that the Russian radio service allowed 1.5 million people to listen to United Nations news through Belarus radio station number 1.

21. One delegation, while commending United Nations Radio's current arrangements with the Voice of Nigeria, asked the Department to enter into a working relationship with the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria, which enjoyed wide coverage in that country. While calling for the pilot radio project to be made an integral part of the Department's activities, one delegation requested a more detailed proposed programme budget for the continuation of the radio-broadcasting project. One speaker, speaking on behalf of his own and another observer delegation, welcomed the pilot broadcasting project, which he characterized as cost-effective and innovative. Such innovative projects should be financed by redeploying resources from less effective or less proven activities, rather than by merely adding a new layer of activity, he argued.

22. The activities of the Outreach Division, aimed at firming up the Department's partnership with civil society, the academic community, the media and library

services, were noted with appreciation by several speakers. One delegation said that building such partnerships would be one way of promoting United Nations activities at the people's level. Another delegation, underlining that the role of the Department was not limited to disseminating information, but also to serving as a window on civil society, noted that the United Nations had greatly benefited from its partnership with civil society. Civil society groups should be relied upon not just as transmitters of information, but as elements influencing decision-making within the Organization. He referred to the role of disabled persons and asked the Department to produce materials in Braille for use by the blind. Another delegation, stressing the importance of informing the international community of the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, thanked the Department for its continuing efforts in this regard. The annual training programme for broadcasters and journalists from developing countries, which was implemented by the Outreach Division, was also cited by a number of delegations as an important outreach activity that should be continued and strengthened. Another delegation, referring to the needs of the Semipalatinsk region of Kazakhstan, which had been affected by nuclear tests, asked the Department to take appropriate measures to enhance world public awareness on this matter. She also asked the Committee to include this issue in a resolution to be adopted at the current session.

23. Another delegation, commenting on the work of the Outreach Division, found some duplication of functions in its work. Moreover, its outreach appeared to be confined to United Nations Headquarters, where there was already a wide range of channels available to facilitate the dissemination of information about the United Nations, he commented.

24. The *UN Chronicle*, considered a flagship publication of the Department and now an integral part of its outreach efforts vis-à-vis educational institutions, was described as a thought-provoking publication by one delegate. He argued that the publication should be allowed to continue serving the Member States and the larger global audience. Presenting an opposing view, another delegation suggested that resources used to produce the *Chronicle* would be better spent, for example, by enhancing the United Nations web site in the six official languages or translating United Nations materials into local languages.

25. Several speakers welcomed the Department's initiative to integrate libraries of the United Nations system, and in this context supported the setting up of the Steering Committee for the modernization and integrated management of the libraries. One delegation, welcoming the efforts to upgrade the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, asked it to take measures to strengthen the depository libraries around the world by providing them training and other assistance. Another delegation recommended that the Dag Hammarskjöld Library assume responsibility for setting policy and coordinating the work of all United Nations libraries. One delegation, taking an opposing view, hoped that the work of the Steering Committee would resolve the unrealistic proposals to transmit to the Dag Hammarskjöld Library the functions of libraries in other locations, including Geneva and Nairobi. Referring to new security measures imposed since September 2001, one delegation called for the Dag Hammarskjöld Library to be reopened for use by members of the public. The newly created Steering Committee should find an adequate solution to the problem resulting from the implementation of extraordinary security measures, he noted. Another delegation, asking the Dag Hammarskjöld Library to increase the amount of information it contained, requested the Department to distribute detailed

information, including a list of information sources available at the library and specific e-mail addresses and symbols.

26. Several speakers commented on the steps being taken by the Department to make performance management an integral part of the Secretary-General's reform efforts, especially the introduction of an annual programme impact review to ensure the alignment of the Department's activities with its priorities. One delegation, representing a large group, noted that self-evaluation and performance management were essential to success; they should not be made contingent on resources from elsewhere being freed up, nor should they be optional for any programme manager. The same delegation also requested the Department to furnish more precise details concerning indicators of achievement and baselines from which to measure future success. Notions of "satisfaction" and "efficiency", which permeated the reports presented for consideration by Committee members, demanded a more thorough interpretation by the Department, he commented. Questioning the link between resource savings and evaluation, one observer described evaluation as a core responsibility that should not hinge on new resources becoming available for that purpose.

27. Strategic partnerships within the United Nations system developed through the newly created United Nations Communications Group were endorsed by several members of the Committee. One speaker commended the Department, especially its head, for recognizing the potential of the Group and for guiding United Nations system partners in developing joint communication strategies. Another delegation, describing the Group as a suitable vehicle for harmonizing the activities of the information community within the United Nations, underscored the need to speak with one distinct, recognizable voice. The Communications Group had the potential to fill this need, he observed.

28. At the end of the general debate, the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information made a statement, in which he responded to a wide range of questions raised by delegations.

Chapter IV

Consideration of reports submitted by the Secretary-General

29. Five reports of the Secretary-General were introduced for consideration by members of the Committee, three by programme managers of the Department of Public Information, one by a representative of the Department of Management and one by a representative of the Office of Internal Oversight Services. The report of the Secretary-General on the reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications (A/AC.198/2003/2) was introduced by the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information in his opening remarks and considered in the general debate, and therefore did not receive a separate review.

30. Introducing the report of the Secretary-General on the programmatic aspects of the proposed programme budget for 2004-2005 for the Department of Public Information (A/AC.198/2003/3), a representative of the Department of Management told the Committee that the report took into account the changes introduced in the Department as part of the reform process initiated by the Secretary-General. A new

mission statement for the Department had been formulated, stating that its mission was to help fulfil the substantive purposes of the United Nations by strategically communicating the activities and concerns of the Organization to achieve the greatest public impact. In adhering to its renewed mandate, the Department would be guided by the priorities laid down by the General Assembly, with its core message drawn from the Millennium Declaration. In order to realize the mission, the Department had created a new operating model based on a clear conception of the Department's role, the elaboration of its functions in a manner that emphasized current communications challenges and the provision of the expected services to Member States. The Department, in its efforts to improve its ability to deliver effective and targeted information programmes, had put into effect a new operating model, which now comprised four subprogrammes: strategic communications services, news services, library services and outreach services. The Secretary-General's report included objectives, expected accomplishments and indicators of achievement for each subprogramme, in line with the new results-based budgeting. The Committee was told that the report presented to it would also be sent to the Committee for Programme and Coordination and eventually to the Fifth Committee.

31. In the interactive dialogue that followed, one delegation noted that the Department's core message, described in A/AC.198/2003/3, annex, paragraph 28.4, did not fully reflect the Millennium Declaration, as it made no reference to the need to promote the establishment of a global strategy of partnership for development. She also noted that the wording in the paragraph on the regionalization of information centres into hubs went beyond General Assembly resolution 57/300, in which the Assembly had confined itself to taking note of the Secretary-General's proposal. The delegation also asked the Department to be more precise on how the resources freed up from the regionalization of information centres would be used.

32. In response, the representative of the Department noted that paragraph 28.4 was a highly summarized reflection of the Department's overall mandate, and it was possible to make modifications concerning the Millennium Declaration. As for more precision on resource allocation, he noted that it was not precise at this stage because not all elements of the arrangements for the hub concept were in place. According to the report, a part of the resources made available through regionalization would be used for strengthening the multilingual capacity of the web site. The balance of the resources would remain in the information centre operation, he explained.

33. A representative of the Department introduced the report of the Secretary-General on the modernization and integrated management of United Nations libraries (A/AC.198/2003/5). The General Assembly, in its resolution 56/253 of 24 December 2001, had requested the Secretary-General to conduct an in-depth review of library activities at Headquarters and the United Nations Offices at Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi, as well as at the regional commissions. As a result of that review, conducted in 2002, the Secretary-General had presented his proposals for the reform of United Nations libraries under three main ideas: that the Dag Hammarskjöld Library would assume responsibility for setting policy and coordinating the work of all United Nations libraries; that the Department of Public Information, in conjunction with the Department of Management, would prepare a comprehensive plan for the integration of library services at various locations through the use of information and communication technologies; and that the Department of Public Information would formulate and implement a plan to improve

electronic access to these services, facilitate the transfer of paper collections to electronic files and provide training to the depository librarians. As a first step, a Steering Committee on the modernization and integrated management of the libraries was created to develop and implement strategies for a more modern, efficient and accessible system of library services within the United Nations. The primary purpose of the Committee, which was chaired by the Department of Public Information and included the heads of each of the libraries in the system, was to foster innovative collaboration among United Nations libraries.

34. One delegation stated that while the Steering Committee was "a good first step", it did not go far enough. In his report, the Secretary-General had recommended that the Dag Hammarskjöld Library be the central manager in enforcing real change. The Steering Committee, on the other hand, was only a consultative body. Another delegation noted that the report contained no specific reference to the question of integration of library services. Given the orientation set out by the Secretary-General in his reform report, he wanted to know why the programmatic aspect of the budget with respect to library services had not set out the objective of integrating those services in a way that reflected what the Secretary-General had originally recommended.

35. A representative of the Department explained that the Steering Committee had been set up, only as a first approach, to devise a collaborative mechanism. As for the programmatic aspects of the budget, he noted, reference had been made so far in the 2004-2005 budget at the level of each of the libraries. In the budget request for the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, for instance, there had been a more detailed request for a modest amount of funds in order to make that system work properly. The delegates concerned were told that a more comprehensive analysis of the programmatic aspects of the proposed programme budget for 2004-2005 would later be provided by the Department of Management. A representative of the Department also agreed to convey to the Secretary-General — and to the Deputy Secretary-General, who had originally proposed the creation of the Steering Committee — the concern expressed by one delegation regarding the leadership role of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library.

36. A representative of the Department presented the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the pilot project on the development of an international radio broadcasting capacity for the United Nations (A/AC.198/2003/4). The Department, in response to General Assembly resolution 56/64 B of 24 December 2001 regarding the implementation of the project, had commissioned a survey on the estimated worldwide audience for United Nations radio programmes in all six official languages, plus Portuguese. The survey, carried out with the active participation of 180 partner stations, revealed that more than 133 million people listen to United Nations Radio at least once a week. The representative of the Department noted that there was intense competition to have material broadcast. The fact that these broadcasters chose to use United Nations Radio broadcasts was a reflection of the fact that they perceived the reports to be impartial and objective.

37. Several delegations congratulated the Department on the success of United Nations Radio. One delegate asked whether resources for the Spanish radio section would be increased; another asked why a Portuguese radio programme was not considered "an official" programme in the report. In response, the representative of the Department said that resource allocations among various language units in United Nations Radio were not expected to change. As for the Portuguese

programme, he noted that Portuguese was not one of the six official languages of the United Nations.

38. Concerning the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Communications Group in 2002 (A/AC.198/2003/6), a representative of the Department noted that the Communications Group, which replaced the Joint United Nations Information Committee, was formed in January 2002, at the initiative of the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, as a flexible and content-driven mechanism for inter-agency coordination in the field of public information and communications. Through the weekly meetings held at United Nations Headquarters and the annual meetings held at rotating locations, the Group provided a forum for broad discussion and policy formulation on both general and specific communications and public information issues. The overall objective of the Group, she noted, was to develop a cohesive and unified voice for the United Nations system. The Group had created a number of task forces on specific issues, including one on the World Summit on the Information Society (2003 and 2005) and another on the International Year of Freshwater 2003. Another joint endeavour for the Group, she noted, was the 2005 World Exposition in Aichi, Japan. With UNESCO as the lead agency, the Group members had decided to participate in a joint United Nations pavilion. Thus, by evolving into a flexible but task-oriented common information and communications platform, the Group had helped the United Nations system to coordinate its activities, avoid duplication and speak with one voice, she concluded.

39. The report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, which included its review of the structure and operations of United Nations information centres, was presented by a representative of that Office. Prepared in response to General Assembly resolutions 48/218 B of 29 July 1994 and 54/244 of 23 December 1999, the report summarized the results of a comprehensive audit of the information centres, highlighting the need for an urgent rethinking of the information centre concept in terms of its usefulness and continued relevance. Noting the discrepancy between centres located in developed and developing countries, the representative said that a significant portion of rent and office maintenance funds, which constituted some 40 per cent of non-staff operating costs, were expended on centres located in developed countries. The Department should therefore assess the need for centres in such countries and review their current number. The report also noted that only a third of the centres were submitting the monthly reports that constituted the principal tool for evaluating their performances. Until recently, no centre was required to prepare and submit annual work plans. The Department of Public Information needed to update the goals, strategies and objectives of the United Nations information centre operation as part of a comprehensive review, the report recommended. It should also carry out an in-depth evaluation of various options to address the issues raised in the report, including the restructuring of information centres on a regional basis and the integration of more centres with local United Nations Development Programme offices or with the lead United Nations agency in the host country or region.

40. Delegations, generally endorsing the concept of regional hubs, wanted to know how the hub approach would be implemented. One delegation wanted to know what the impact of regionalization would be for Portuguese-speaking countries, especially for those in Africa. Another delegation wanted to know if the interests of the French-speaking African countries would be taken into account when establishing

guidelines for a regional hub concept. One delegation wanted to know whether indicators regarding the impact of the work of the information centres and the level of voluntary contributions of host countries, civil society and the private sector had been taken into account.

41. In response, a representative of the Office of Internal Oversight Services noted that the main recommendation of her Office, which had been able to provide in-depth analysis of only five centres, was for the Department of Public Information to rethink the information centre concept. The regional hub concept was one option that stemmed from the rethinking. A representative of the Department of Public Information later noted that the Secretary-General had proposed that the restructuring process take place over three years. She further noted that her Department was currently trying to develop new criteria to assess the impact of the centres on the ground. Regarding the French-speaking countries, she noted that French was one of the six official languages of the United Nations and that information materials were available in that language. Besides, the special needs of the French-language countries, especially those in Africa, would be taken into account.